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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004495

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CENTER-RIGHT OPPOSITION DYP: POISED, BUT NOT YET  
READY

REF: ANKARA 004497

Classified By: PolCouns Janice Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The governing, pro-Islam Justice and Development Party (AKP) remains the juggernaut of Turkish electoral politics, but the center-right True Path Party (DYP) is trying to attract nationalist and secular center-right voters from small towns and rural areas. DYP Chairman Mehmet Agar has been active traveling around the country and giving stump speeches, but the party has yet to attempt to build a party organization that could challenge AKP at the grassroots level. End Summary.

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DYP Hovering at Threshold  
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12. (C) Turkish public opinion polls conducted over the past year routinely indicate that governing AKP is supported by a strong plurality of respondents and center-right DYP in hovering in the high single digits or low teens. Parliamentary elections must be held by November 2007. Most Embassy contacts inside and outside of DYP believe the party stands an excellent chance of crossing the 10 percent electoral threshold and winning seats in the next parliament.

13. (C) DYP received 9.55 percent of the vote in the November 2002 election, missing the threshold by only a few thousand votes. DYP polled well over the threshold in many rural areas and smaller towns, but was clobbered in Turkey,s larger cities. DYP, for example, received only 3.6 percent of the vote in Istanbul and only 5.4 percent in Ankara. DYP did better in the May 2004 nationwide local elections winning 15 percent of the vote, according to DYP MP Mehmet Eraslan.

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Active Leadership, Weak Organization  
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14. (C) DYP Chairman Mehmet Agar has been stumping around the country and appearing on television programs. Earlier this year, DYP paid over USD 1 million for a glitzy TV advertising campaign that ran on 13 TV channels. DYP advisor Dr. Cagri Erhan, DYP Ankara provincial chairman Bulent Kusolgu, and other DYP members have praised Agar,s active campaigning and leadership ability. At DYP rallies earlier this year, 25,000 people reportedly filled an Istanbul stadium to capacity and 50,000 attend a rally in Hatay.

¶15. (C) DYP, however, has been unable --- or unwilling --- to build a broad grassroots organization. Obahan Obanoglu, an advisor to Agar and a former DYP youth group chairman, described to us the difficulties in building a party without financial resources (reftel). Obanoglu also noted that DYP does not have a large body or volunteer base of ideologically committed members willing to canvas for the party at the precinct level. Many powerful businessmen and media barons have been unwilling, so far, to provide significant support to DYP because they fear retaliation from AKP, according to Erhan.

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DYP Developing Its Platform  
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¶16. (C) In a recent meeting with us, Chairman Agar asserted that the Turkish electorate is most concerned about economic issues and unemployment. In Agar,s view, all other issues are of secondary importance. Erhan told us that the party has formed five committees with academic advisors and other experts to develop policy programs on five different topics, i.e., agriculture, economics/unemployment, education, foreign policy, and health care. They plan to post their results on the party Internet site and publish them in book form.

¶17. (C) Agar said that he believes he is the only Turkish leader who can solve the Kurdish problem because of his strong nationalist and counter-terrorist credentials. (Note: Agar was the head of the Turkish National Police in the 1990s and heavily involved in some questionable actions against the PKK and its alleged sympathizers. End Note.) Agar claimed

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that if he were prime minister, he would offer an amnesty for all PKK except the senior leadership and implement economic development in the southeast. He would, however, be reluctant to offer additional cultural or linguistic rights to the Kurds.

¶18. (C) Agar also believes that he can solve the headscarf problem. He sees DYP as having credibility on this issue because it is both strongly secular and supportive of the Muslim identity. The restrictions against female students wearing headscarves at universities should be lifted. In general, Agar believes that anyone receiving state services should be allowed to wear a headscarf, while those providing state services (e.g., teachers, professors, social workers, and doctors and nurses at state hospitals) should remain uncovered.

¶19. (C) DYP is also reaching out to scholars attempting to reform Turkish Islam. Dr. Mohammed Cakmak of Ankara University is an advisor to Agar on religious issues. Cakmak is part of a broader scholarly effort to strengthen the so-called moderate, tolerant, and mystical Sufi tradition within Anatolian Islam and make peace between the Sufi tradition and the broader Sunni tradition. DYP wants to use the Anatolian Islamic traditions, including the tarikats (Sufi brotherhoods) and cemaats (religious societies), to strengthen positive, tolerant, and modernizing aspects of Turkish Islam.

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What,s Holding DYP Back?  
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¶10. (C) Comment. Two factors hold back DYP,s popularity. The first is Chairman Agar himself. Although he is a popular leader in many nationalist and pro-state circles, many Turks do not trust him because he was heavily involved in the dirty aspects of the war against the Kurds in the 1990s. Secondly, DYP,s history of political corruption and incompetence, especially during the 1990s, create a drag on its potential popularity.

¶11. (C) Comment, continued. DYP stands, however, a good chance of winning parliamentary seats in the next election. DYP has an active leadership, is developing a policy platform, and is trying to focus on realistic solutions to problems faced by the average Turk. The party leadership, however, has failed to build an organization with strong grassroots. DYP has also failed, so far, to develop a coherent set of economic policies, despite Agar's assertion that economic issues form the main concerns of the Turkish people. DYP has potential, but if it fails to cross the 10 percent threshold, it will have no one to blame but itself. End Comment.

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